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ABSTRACT

The transportation needs of the 30% of the population living in rural America, particularly those of the elderly, handicapped, poor, isolated, young, carless, and unemployed, are more critical than the needs of their counterparts in urban areas because of the lack of rural public transportation. Yet, only about 1% of the capitol federal investment and annual operating moneys spent on public transportation are allocated to help meet rural needs. Creating and running a public transportation system in a rural area can be a fairly simple job if the guidelines outlined in this handbook are followed. Basic decisions required are: defining the geographic area to be served; identifying the area's priority transportation needs and available resources; agreeing on the public/private ownership mix; specifying the jurisdiction and authority of the sponsor; deciding on the best type of system to meet local needs; and determining if an outside consultant is needed. The most important ingredients are a strong local sponsor and a good manager. Other aspects to consider include personnel, vehicles, routing and scheduling, maintenance, accountability, economic viability, insurance, and funding. More than 93 federal-level programs can fund transportation systems, components, or rides for eligible persons. Pitfalls to avoid include resistance to coordination; a "do-nothing" approach while searching for the "perfect" formula; poor communication; aloofness from the public; and organizational "traps". (NEC)

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RURAL RIDES

A Practical Handbook for Starting and Operating a Rural Public Transportation System

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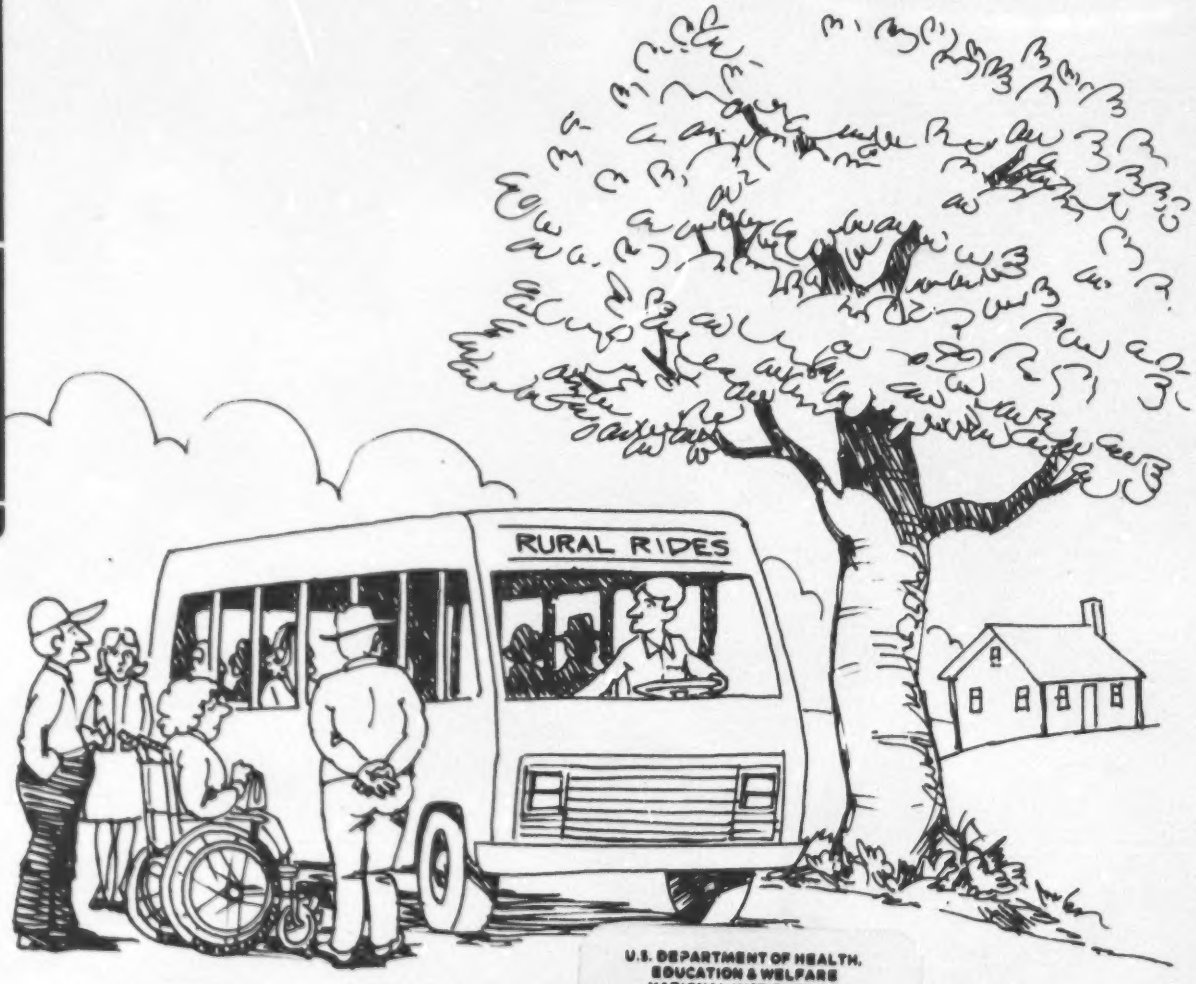

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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
FARMERS HOME ADMINISTRATION
IN COOPERATION WITH
THE NATIONAL COUNCIL
FOR THE TRANSPORTATION DISADVANTAGED

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Contents

Introduction 2
Planning and Basic Decisions 4
Personnel 6
Vehicles 10
Routing and Scheduling 11
Maintenance 13
Accountability 14
Economics 15
Insurance 16
Funding Sources 16
Pitfalls 18
Sources of Additional Information 20

You can help insure that better transportation will be provided in your area, no matter who you are. This handbook can help point the way. It's a collection of practical information and suggestions from people throughout the country who have successfully started, financed, and operated coordinated rural public transportation systems.

Successful transportation systems are initiated locally, not by officials in Washington or your State capital. Local officials (both elected and appointed) in your town, county, or region are the most important people to show that:

- There is a genuine need for improved transportation services locally.
- Sponsoring and funding transportation is good politics.
- Coordination through consolidation of existing transportation services makes sense and can be the best way to start a system that will eventually serve everybody.
- Planning, operating, and financial assistance is available.
- State and Federal lawmakers and officials will react favorably to local appeals for better rural transportation programs and funding.

Think positive and DO IT. Careful planning is important, of course, but too often worthwhile programs get bogged down in overplanning, negotiations, and studies. In rural areas the people who need rides and the public officials willing to help arrange to provide them are the real experts. So, decide to act now and DO IT.

National Outlook

With almost 30 percent of our population living in rural America, only about 1 percent of the capital Federal investment and annual operating moneys spent on public transportation are allocated to help meet rural needs.

This imbalance affects all rural people, but especially the elderly, handicapped, poor, isolated, young, carless, unemployed, and other disadvantaged rural Americans. In fact, the transportation needs of these rural residents are more critical than the needs of their counterparts in urban areas because of the lack of public transportation and other factors in rural areas. Yet, there is no Federal agency for rural people to go to for such assistance.

Congress is responsible for seeing that funds are provided for both urban and rural public transportation. If you are concerned about rural transportation, you should write or call your representative and senators giving them information about your local needs and ideas on how to solve them.

Local Political Support

As helpful as Federal programs and officials may be, local political support is infinitely more valuable. Remember, you can run a program with only strong local support and no Federal help, but no one can run a system without local support. Win enthusiastic and firm backing of members of the governing body of the jurisdiction(s) that the new transportation system will be serving.

Acknowledge that elected officials will benefit greatly by being associated with a successful system popular with senior citizens and other potent voting blocks. Press releases concerning plans and services should be issued in the name of the local political people who are sponsoring the system. Keep the public informed fully and your new system will deserve and keep the vital local support needed to succeed.

Rural—Different From Urban

As opposed to big city transit systems that are primarily designed to shuttle people to and from work, rural transportation systems generally start up to provide rides to and from various social services. There is no question that such "people programs" have political overtones, and that's not necessarily bad. Except for the motivation to provide popular, needed programs to the electorate, most rural services wouldn't exist.

Creating and running a public transportation system in a rural area can be actually a fairly simple job. The only thing brilliant about it is its simplicity. By following the steps outlined in this handbook, you can keep it simple, keep costs down and help

everybody—riders, politicians, taxpayers, and voters alike.

Inventory "What's Happening"

Chances are that a number of transportation services are already being provided in your town, county, or region. Take an inventory of what's happening now. Contact city hall, your county courthouse, and any public or private agencies or organizations operating in the area.

Knowing "who's doing what" in your area now will help you assess what the future transportation needs may be and how to try to meet them. Many areas regularly make such inventories as part of their ongoing planning efforts or as part of assessments of social service needs. Call the local planning board and ask around for this information. It most likely is close at hand.

Over the years, spurred by Federal and State directives and programs, many people-oriented social services have been established around the Nation. There are programs to aid the elderly, help the physically and mentally handicapped, assist the poor, train unemployed persons, and help minorities and other disadvantaged persons.

Transportation Component

A common thread that runs through practically every local social services program is the need for transportation. Without transportation, kids can't get to Head Start centers, unemployed persons find it difficult to get to manpower and job training programs, the elderly can't get to senior centers, and people in need of health services are unable to get to clinics and hospitals. This is true with just about every other similar service.

Knowing this, the authorities build a transportation component into virtually all of these "people programs." That simply means that a portion of the funds provided for each program can be used to provide transportation to and from the programs.

What this process has created over the years is a myriad of mini-transportation systems in nearly every given area. Each different agency or program has a van or two, cars, maybe even buses, to transport their particular program clients.

Rationale for Coordination

Considered in perspective, such a system is inefficient and expensive. Manpower, fuel, and vehicles are wasted. Such fragmented transportation services usually operate under capacity and at limited times each week or day.

These existing, but limited and valuable, assets should be pooled into a broader based transportation system where the whole will be greater than the sum of its parts. This objective is called coordination. Every responsible person and agency at every level of government supports the concept. At the Federal level, agreements between agencies have already been signed, not only to permit coordination of transportation services but to encourage it. Despite

feelings to the contrary, there are no statutory or regulatory restrictions which prohibit coordination. This was revealed in a 1977 inquiry by the General Accounting Office.

Coordination of transportation services is good for the agencies involved because it frees them from an administrative, mechanical, and scheduling burden. This enables them to concentrate on their program and services, thus helping their clients and participants who need the service being offered and who need to mix and share experiences with their neighbors and others. Coordination is good for the taxpayers and contributors who foot the ultimate bill because waste, inefficiency, and duplication of effort should be eliminated. And it's good for everybody in the participating town, county, or area because the savings can be passed on to the public in the form of increased transportation services.

Someone To Do It

All that it takes to initiate and accomplish coordination is someone in a town, county, or region who is willing and determined to get started and DO IT. This "prime mover" could be a housewife, a mayor, the leader of a senior citizens or handicapped group, an organization volunteer, or literally anybody who cares enough to pursue the worthwhile goal of better transportation.

Working this way is good government and good politics. In our system of government, decisions are made in a political climate. Elected officials with the authority to vote for a transportation system will do so only after they are convinced that the proposed plan is in the public interest and that it will be popular with the people (that is, voters).

On the political and efficiency score, coordinated programs are virtually "no fault." Coordination appeals to all segments of the population, regardless of their political persuasion. More rides can be provided for less cost and that makes sense to everybody.

Help is available for those interested enough to seek it. But first, some basic decisions must be made about the unique situation in each local area embarking on an effort to start and operate a rural public transportation system.

As soon as you have taken an inventory of existing transportation services, begin the second phase of your planning. A number of basic decisions have to be made which will shape your new coordinated rural transportation system. These include:

- *Decide what geographic area should be served.*

This could be a town, county, or region composed of towns or counties. Many feel rural transportation systems are best handled with county boundaries, as many other services are already set up according to county boundaries. Also, most counties are rural-oriented.

- *Identify your area's priority transportation needs and available resources.*

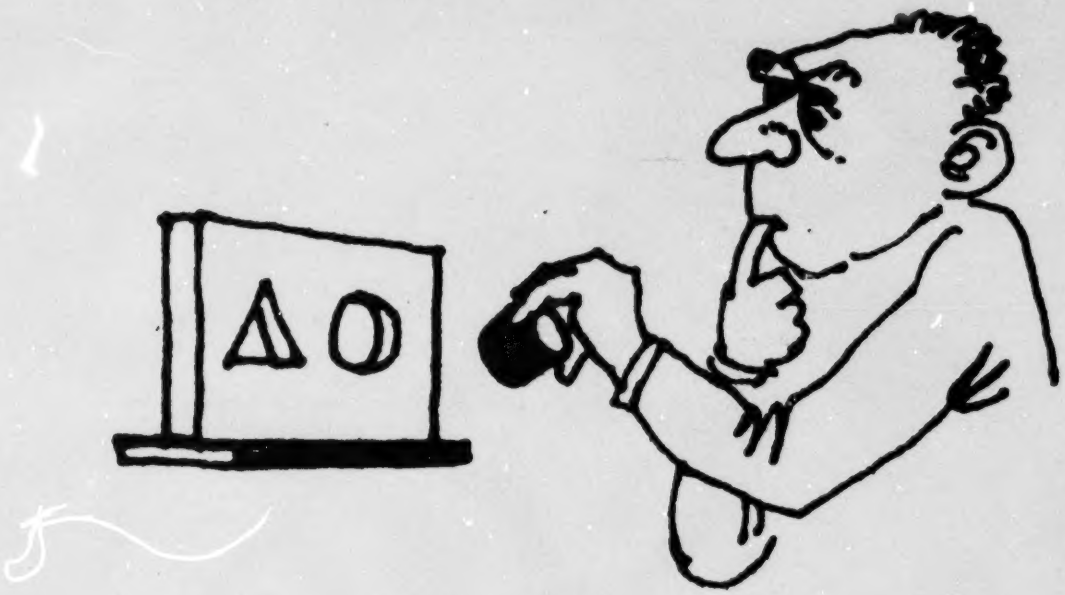
Here's where the "who gets to ride" priorities must be set. This step is not intended to limit service, but it is essential to set priorities for scheduling and incremental expansion of service. Consider these possible priority groups: clients of agencies agreeing to coordinate their transportation equipment and budgets, the handicapped, the elderly, low-income family members, unemployed persons, students, people bound for nonemergency medical facilities, public employees, shoppers, workers to and from jobs, and, finally, the general public.

- *Agree on the public/private ownership mix.*

Contact the privately owned bus, taxi, and other transportation systems to determine the extent to which they can handle the priority rides. Compare the costs and make a determination of the level of governmental support, subsidy, or operation that is justified.

Be sure privately owned systems can serve all the transportation needs and not just the lucrative routes, services, and schedules.

If it seems feasible to rely on existing, private operations to meet a significant portion of the transportation needs, consider having the county government hire a transportation coordinator. The coordinator, who can usually save more money by his efforts than his position costs, would assist private operators with strategy and paperwork on grants, subsidies, and other assistance to insure that the desired transportation systems, are, in fact, made available to the public.



- *Specify the jurisdiction and authority of the sponsor.*

Decide levels of authority and responsibility. Will the coordinated transportation system be an arm of county government, a nonprofit organization, or an authority, or what? Who's going to carry the ball?

- *Decide on the best type of system to meet local needs.*

Consider fixed-route bus service, various levels of demand-responsive systems, special service to handle wheelchairs, or other options. This will be suggested largely by the needs identified in your survey. (A discussion of various types of systems is included in Routing and Scheduling.)

- *Determine if you need to hire an outside consultant.*

A number of qualified and well-experienced private consultants are available to assist in the planning and implementation of rural transportation systems. Decide if you need such help. Also, operators of successful rural public transportation systems elsewhere are usually willing to give advice and even help set up new, similar programs. The national organization of these operators, the National Council for the Transportation Disadvantaged (NCTD), organizes "Task Forces" of experienced people to come into an area requesting assistance to actually plan and initiate such programs. NCTD welcomes inquiries.

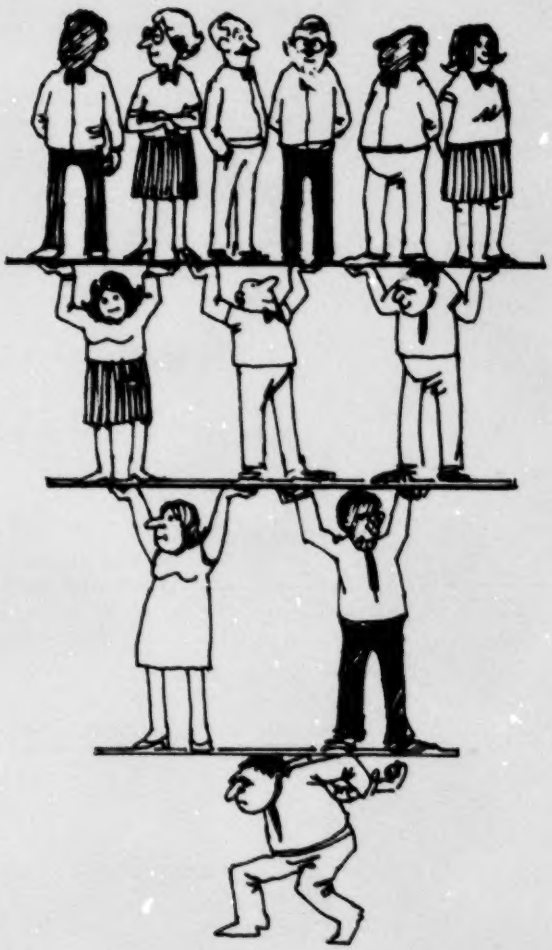
Make these basic decisions with due citizen participation and through the governing body or offices of the sponsor. Welcome everybody's input, but set a schedule of deadlines and stick to them in order to have these decisions made and agreed to.

Be pragmatic. Don't be afraid to back down from any decision when experience, new information, or common sense call for a new course. It's better to start off in the right direction and then have to alter course for a precise heading rather than spend all your time making the "perfect" plan that never gets implemented. Be prepared to change course even after you start operating. There's always room for improvement.

Other specific decisions will be discussed now.

To provide an effective public transportation service, your personnel must be effective public servants and remember at all times that they work for the taxpayers.

Insist on a professional, courteous, proud, punctual, and cost-effective operation. In transportation, cost-effectiveness can be measured by the cost per passenger mile. Cost per passenger mile is computed by dividing the total operating budget of the entire transportation system by the total number of passenger miles in the same period. For example, a van which carries 10 riders 40 miles has delivered 400 passenger miles of service. As personnel will be the largest item on your system's budget, the number and cost of employees has a big effect on your economic viability.



Remember, a system's success is measured by the cost per passenger mile. Thus, the goal of cost-effectiveness is best reached by keeping administrative costs down and by efficient use of all available vehicles to deliver rides.

Selection of the Manager

The two most important ingredients in a successful rural transportation system are a strong local sponsor and a good manager. A good manager can make even a mediocre system work, but a poor manager can mess up the best setup in the country.

Selection of a manager is a judgment call. The criteria will differ from area to area and situation to situation. Still, there are some common attributes to look for, including:

- Common sense, as evidenced by a successful background, clear thinking on current issues, and fair judgment.
- Diplomacy and tact, in order to deal with people on all levels, reach compromises, and motivate others. Sensitivity to people and their needs is very important.
- Administrative ability to handle employees, set policy, surmount paperwork, and provide sound financial supervision and control. Budget experience, an understanding of the coordination concept, labor relations background, and an appreciation of efficiency and cost-effectiveness are other attributes to look for.
- Sales and promotion ability, to sell the program to the political powers, sell the service to the using public, and instill pride in employees and others.

Still a relatively new field, rural public transportation system management offers many career opportunities and should attract capable people. The manager should be your highest paid employee.

Since the subject of rural public transportation is not yet taught in any of our colleges and universities, a college degree should not be mandatory. Likewise, a background in planning should not be required. In fact, a planning background may even be a liability. A criticism that is true too often is that planners bog themselves down with unnecessary minutiae and concentrate too much on form rather than substance. Planners can be valuable if their role is subordinate to and supportive of system management rather than the opposite.

Another background that may be unnecessary when searching for the right person to run your rural transportation system is experience in urban mass transit. Small rural systems usually can't afford to hire a manager-calibre person who has urban experience and, more to the point, rural operations are significantly different from urban ones!

What do you look for in a manager? If someone develops a way to evaluate a person's common sense quotient, managers will be easy to identify. Couple common sense with integrity and you have your manager. Managers can be found almost anywhere, perhaps from the business community where success is easily measured, or in one of the social service agencies being coordinated.

The manager must also be a salesperson and a promoter. The transportation services must be "sold" to the public and to the political powers, and the manager must keep the system on good terms with the media and governmental officials at every level.

The role of the manager in developing and keeping good relations with the elected officials of the jurisdiction(s) served by the transportation system cannot be overstressed.

The system manager isn't the one who was elected by the people to make major policy decisions. The manager is hired to operate the system according to the policies established by the elected officials who control the budget.

Since the politicians are the ones who are elected to speak for the people, the wise manager will see to it that it is the elected officials who speak to the people. Press releases about the system should be

made in their name. It's important to them and, in the long run, it's important to the success of the system.

Selection of Drivers

Drivers must have safe driving records, proper licenses, knowledge of the territory, a friendly nature and willingness to help people, and ability to successfully complete first aid, defensive driving, and other training. Drivers also must be responsible for punctuality, recordkeeping, vehicle maintenance, and a courteous attitude toward the riders and taxpaying public.

Look for a number of important personal attitudes and traits when interviewing applicants. Hiring people with these special qualifications will help to insure the success of your service.

Drivers come in direct, personal, face-to-face contact with the public. They actually deliver the service you are in business to provide: rural rides. Sensitivity to the needs and feelings of people and reliability to carry out assignments punctually are two of the traits to look for in potential drivers, whether men or women. Coordinated transportation will serve many senior citizens who need understanding, sometimes help with grocery bags, and other special care. Other likely clients can be handicapped persons whose smooth access in and out of vehicles is very important. Drivers must be sensitive to these situations as well as hundreds of others.

Pre-employment written agreements between prospective drivers and the system manager are often made to start their important relationship in the right direction. For instance, drivers are asked to agree in writing that they will be courteous to riders and the public at all times. Writing this down clears up any future misunderstanding that courtesy is at the driver's option.

Another topic for written agreement as a condition of employment is that any unsafe happening or accident which is the driver's fault may be cause for dismissal and that two accidents that are the other party's fault may still be cause for dismissal. The reason behind this seemingly unreasonable attitude is that a driver consciously operating defensively can prevent accidents that are clearly the fault of other drivers. This strict policy may also have a beneficial effect on the cost of insurance for the system.

Drivers should agree to be trained as directed by the manager and to keep themselves and their vehicles clean and neat at all times. They must understand clearly in advance of hiring that acceptance of donations, tips, or gifts is strictly forbidden.

In addition to any necessary licensing requirements of the State, drivers should receive basic training about the goals and procedures of the transportation system. This orientation presentation, usually by the manager, is important to the driver's own attitude about his or her role in the system. Each driver should then complete the National Safety Council's Defensive Driver Course over a period of 8 hours. On their own time, drivers are also expected to complete a standard First Aid course approved by the American Red Cross with fees and/or tuitions to be paid by the system. These courses usually run some 80 hours over several weeks, but will prove highly valuable to the drivers and the system's effectiveness in dealing with emergencies.

Drivers should be uniformed. This prevents a kaleidoscope of costumes such as baseball caps, bowling shirts, and mackinaws. The serious training, high standards of service, and uniforms combine to create an intangible asset called "esprit de corps" or pride. It's contageous, and every effort must be made to instill and maintain pride in the service being provided. Even more important is the opportunity to actually save someone's life by safe handling of the vehicle and familiarity with emergency medical

"YOU NEED A KA-THUNKA, KA-THUNKA MECHANIC. I ONLY DO KER-PLUNK WORK."

techniques. If riders are predominantly elderly persons, this may definitely be expected. Be prepared!

Even with all the pre-employment conditions and training, it should be pointed out that once the driver leaves the garage, he or she is "captain of the ship." Drivers are responsible for the safe transport of the passengers, the maintenance of the assigned schedule, and the goodwill of the system. The net effect of all the preparations is a highly motivated corps of drivers who will help achieve the goals of the system.

Selection of Other Employees

Here are the likely employees of a rural transportation system, presented in the order in which the system would most likely grow:

1. *Dispatcher* receives phone requests from prospective riders and must be efficient, courteous, and motivated to achieve maximum cost-effectiveness through "creative dispatching," which simply means carrying as many people as possible in the same direction in the same vehicle. As the dispatcher has direct personal contact with the public by telephone, the person holding this position should have a calm, friendly phone voice and be able to "pitch-in" around the office on any task that needs to be accomplished. (See Routing and Scheduling.)
2. *Secretary/Office Manager* handles paperwork and general recordkeeping and assists the Manager in administrative functions.
3. *Maintenance Mechanic* is added when a system grows to several vehicles needing constant maintenance. (See Maintenance.)
4. *Bookkeeper/Accountant* joins the system when necessary recordkeeping due to grant requirements and other duties justifies it. (See Accountability.)

Vehicles

Many people would like to have a chauffeur-driven limousine on call to take them any place, any time. And it would be nice to provide a plush $85,000 cross-country transit bus for trips to and from the grocery store, but cost-effective rural public transportation calls for more reasonable vehicles.

Systems starting out by coordinating previously fragmented agency transportation services will most likely inherit a group of used, ill-matched vans and buses. Make do for the time being! Move people. Prove it can be done cost effectively and then build on a proven record of success by ordering new, more suitable vehicles.

Vehicles should be selected to meet specific functions and identified needs. Generally, buses in two sizes, 44 and 20 passengers each, are most suitable for fixed-route services, while 6- and 15-passenger vans are best for demand-response systems. Some areas have found that school-type buses are quite adequate for these purposes and can be cost-effectively operated and justified to funding sources.

Some State governments are making bulk purchases of buses so that transit systems and localities in the State can benefit from reduced, fleet prices or even secure units at no local cost. Contact your State Department of Transportation to discuss this.

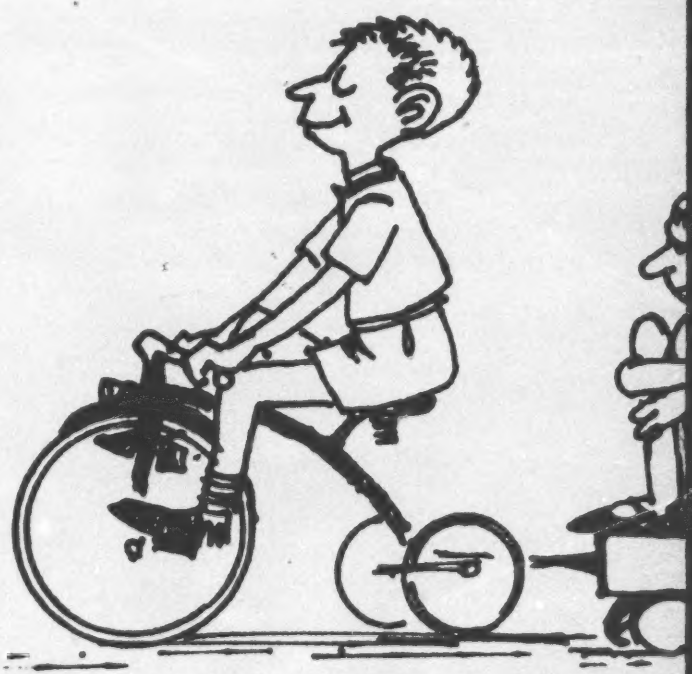
In preparation for ordering vehicles, consult with other operators, manufacturers, funding sources, and every other knowledgeable individual or agency to discuss the latest regulations, options, and other relevant factors.

Should you make major purchases by public bidding, satisfy yourself that the bid specifications clearly call for the vehicles which will meet the needs of your system's riders within a financial range acceptable to your sponsor and outside funding sources. Think about maintenance before purchasing vehicles and consult local dealers on maintenance and parts considerations.

Every transportation system should provide service for wheelchair-bound persons. By October 1979, all new urban transit buses must be accessible for both elderly (low floor and shallow steps) and handicapped (ramps). Rural systems are encouraged to provide similar accessibility, particularly on demand-response vehicles.

Among 1978 vehicle prices are the following:

- Vans range from approximately $6,000 to $25,000, depending on special options and carry 12 to 15 ambulatory riders. Wheelchair lifts and "lock-in" spaces reduce the number of passengers.
- Mid-size buses, carrying 20 persons or so, now cost $9,000 to $35,000.
- School-type buses, carrying 22 to 44 passengers or so, run $11,000 to $15,000 each.
- Transit buses, usually seating 40 or more people, cost upwards of $70,000 each.
- "Retrofitters," firms which specialize in custom work for transportation systems, can make many desirable changes to a standard van or bus, such as raise the roof, air condition, install lifts and ramps and wider doors, and rearrange the seats.



The Departments of Transportation at both State and Federal levels, plus many organizations, such as the National Council for the Transportation Disadvantaged (NCTD), can supply lists of vehicle manufacturers and retrofitters and suppliers.

One thing to be avoided by politicians sponsoring systems and managers operating them relates to the old saying that "the only difference between men and boys is the price of their toys." That applies particularly to transportation vehicle selection. The system is not a substitute for a childhood toy train set or collection of "matchbox" cars. Don't put the system's vehicle and equipment together as a "collection." Think only of the intended use of the equipment. One might think it would look real "snappy" to have a lot of currently popular, wildly painted vans running around. It's fine if it fits the functional needs of the system's passengers, such as safety, comfort, and efficiency, but the decision should not be made on the basis of style alone.

Transportation systems succeed or fail largely on the basis of impressions which riders, taxpayers, and politicians get of the system as a result of routing and scheduling. Desirable impressions relate to reliability, punctuality, responsiveness, and efficiency by making the most of limited equipment and manpower.

Systems which get their impetus by coordinating existing service will have basic scheduling decisions already made. The new coordinated system, for instance, must continue to transport clients to and from the lunch program. In return, the nutrition program's vehicles can be used to meet other transportation needs which were not previously being met.

Once the primary responsibilities of the coordinated system are entered on a master schedule, other transportation needs can be carefully scheduled from the priority list which was previously agreed to.

Fixed Routes

Setting routes and schedules for regular fixed route bus service is mostly a matter of common sense, but it's so vital a part of planning that the manager should not delegate the responsibility.

Your initial assessment of transportation needs will suggest priorities for both your fixed routes and demand-responsive service. Although circumstances do vary from area to area, several important surveys have shown that one major transportation need is transportation of senior citizens to shopping areas. As a matter of policy, therefore, many social service transportation systems seek to provide at least one shopping trip per week to each senior citizen.

These can be scheduled best in consultation with senior citizen groups, merchants, and local officials who know where isolated citizens are located and where they need to travel.

Depending on the population density, terrain and other local factors, wide-aisle buses which carry 20 to 44 passengers may be best for senior citizen transportation.

Each bus can be scheduled to make two complete shopping runs every day in most situations. That's 10 different routes each week that can be provided by a

single vehicle. Each trip should consist of an hour-long pick-up sweep on the way to a shopping destination, a 1-hour to 90-minute wait at the shopping center area, and approximately an hour long return sweep to drop passengers off near their homes. A creative dispatcher may find uses for the bus in the shopping center area while the original riders are shopping.

Pickup locations and schedules can be developed along each route at convenient intervals. Go out and actually drive the proposed routes to clock pickup times along the way. Drivers are instructed to pickup passengers on signal.

Print some easy-to-read bus route maps and schedules and distribute them throughout the service area, door-to-door if possible and through every available media. Posters can be posted in stores, churches, and other places people frequent. Be certain to date every edition of the schedules as they'll no doubt have to be revised time and again. Each area of service should have its own map and schedule.

The transportation program should build incrementally. Start with a bus service you can handle with available vehicles and manpower, then build as needs are identified and as funds permit. Build, adjust, and make improvements as circumstances dictate and permit. Once political approvals are secured, start delivering rides as soon as possible.

Demand-Responsive System

The more personalized demand-responsive public transportation services involve the use of vans, perhaps even cars and small buses to transport individuals or groups of individuals to eligible destinations, which are determined as a matter of policy.

Health clinics, doctor's offices, government buildings, social services, senior citizen centers, and similar facilities can be easily itemized as eligible destinations.

At the outset, announcements are made of the availability of limited demand-responsive or "dial-a-ride" service according to any eligibility criteria established by policy. A phone number is

"CAN YOU TELL ME WHEN THE LAST BUS CAME BY?"

listed well in advance, and a starting date is set.

Here is where "creative dispatching" comes in. By endeavoring to "group" riders who need to go the same directions, the overall efficiency of the system can be enhanced. Regular runs, for instance to the eye doctor every Thursday, can be scheduled from a given area if the need exists. Aides who schedule doctors' appointments are usually happy to cooperate with transportation schedules.

The dispatcher should encourage the use of the fixed-route service whenever possible, even if riders or doctors have to adjust appointments and their own schedules. When that proves impossible, the demand-responsive service is scheduled to meet the need.

Communication is important between dispatcher and drivers at the beginning and end of each day and at intervals in between. Ideally, two-way radios should keep drivers in constant touch with the dispatcher. Citizens Band Radios are better than nothing, but not much better because CB airwaves are already clogged and ranges are too limited in many areas. Some systems use radio dispatched "beeper" devices to signal drivers to phone the dispatcher.

Limit service to nonemergency transportation whenever possible. Let rescue squads, ambulances, and police handle any emergencies. Demand-responsive service has to be planned. It can usually be planned a full day in advance, so that a complete schedule can be handed to drivers each morning for the entire day.

The importance of vehicle maintenance cannot be overemphasized. passenger safety and comfort, along with cost-effective operation, must remain primary goals of every system.

Transportation systems created by coordinating previously fragmented services will no doubt start off with a mix of vehicle makes, models, and conditions, instead of a fleet of the same kind of vehicles where maintenance can be carefully monitored.

Drivers can be made responsible for routine maintenance functions such as vehicle cleanliness and daily checks of gas, oil, tire pressure, belts, battery charge, hoses, and the overall appearance of the van or bus. Drivers should fill out a daily vehicle check sheet and be required to sign it and turn it in without fail.

Mechanical maintenance, however, must be done by trained professionals. New, smaller systems just starting often contract with the service department of local dealers of major vehicle manufacturers for regular inspections, repairs, and maintenance of all vehicles in the system, regardless of make, model, or age.

Where this is impossible, or when the transportation system grows to a sufficient size, an in-house mechanic and/or maintenance facility should be established. It may be possible to arrange for use of vehicle maintenance facilities of the vocational school, National Guard, local or State government.

The mechanic should be versatile, reliable, and experienced. Provide him with suitable space, the necessary tools and equipment, and a basic inventory of frequently used supplies. Set up a specific, regular maintenance program.

Preventive maintenance is an absolute must. Taking care of problems before they happen will save not only money but also a lot of service interruption, and possible lives.

Some people think a fleet of the same kind of vehicles is extremely important. It's not. Not if you have a good mechanic. It's a little easier, but it isn't vital. Since most governments are required to purchase by a bidding procedure, most transportation systems end up with a vehicle mix. What this means in a practical sense is that it will be unwise to try to stock up on a lot of parts to meet every situation. Simply build a suitable inventory of belts, hoses, points, plugs, and other inexpensive parts.

An added bonus of having an "in-house" mechanic would accrue if you hire someone who also has some body and fender repair work experience. Every transportation system needs this kind of work from time to time.

As part of the mechanic's orientation, explain the entire system. Make certain the mechanic knows what the goals are and what his or her vital role is in maintaining service and keeping the costs down. Be sure to stress the importance of safety as it relates to the vehicles in the mechanic's care.

"I CAN'T UNDERSTAND IT. I GOT THE WHOLE THING APART AND STILL CAN'T FIGURE OUT WHAT'S WRONG."

Rural systems operate under strict, frugal, and accountable conditions imposed by local officials who still find waste and spending excesses politically intolerable.

Private operations, whether run by profit-oriented businesses or nonprofit organizations, are accountable to boards of directors or owners, to pressures of the market place, the Internal Revenue Service, and a score of other local, State and Federal agencies, laws, and regulations.

Similarly, operators of tax-supported transportation systems are held accountable by sponsors, political pressures, budget limitations, funding sources, various reporting procedures, and ultimately, the taxpayers who foot the bill.

A system must be accountable both for program accomplishments and failures and for the financial picture to its sponsor, whether it's a private organization's board of directors or the governing body of county, town or group of counties or towns.

Accurate facts, statistics, reports and testimonials, from satisified riders and client groups are critical in this overall effort to be accountable. These are usually prepared both at monthly and annual intervals. Photographs, newspaper clippings, and correspondence from riders also can be useful.

Each local, State, and Federal agency which provides funds for transportation imposes different financial accountability requirements with different forms due on different dates throughout each funding year, which is often different from agency to agency.

Transportation systems which coordinate the transportation needs, vehicles, and budgets of a number of different agencies must comply with the unique financial accounting systems of those agencies.

Thus, a bookkeeper and a nearby accountant are important to every transportation system from the outset. The bookkeeper can work with agencies to try to use uniform information and try to develop a standard form that will serve all needs. Each agency can help in setting up the proper books and records to satisfy its requirements.

Because of the importance attached to coordination by most Federal agencies, the bookkeeper and accountant should not hesitate to suggest to the agencies ways and means of simplifying these procedures in a coordinated system.

Consider the following partial list of records which should be kept for full accountability:

- Operating budget with current encumberances.
- Daily mileage and passenger count logs for each vehicle.
- Identification of riders as necessary to comply with various eligibility requirements of funding sources.
- Complete fuel data, signed daily vehicle check lists, and maintenance records on each vehicle.
- Allocation of costs to funding sources.
- Dispatcher's instructions to drivers.
- Weekly, monthly, and annual cost-per-passenger-mile analysis.

As systems grow, forward-thinking managers and bookkeepers turn to computers to manage the mountain of information which is generated by transportation systems and to maintain accountability procedures which are adequate to satisfy several agencies.

Accountability is a vital area, and success here is critical to the economic viability of any transportation system.

It's important at the start of each transportation system to have a clear picture of its future economic viability. Systems can progress through a number of different stages to ultimately reach whatever goals is set as a matter of policy by the governing body of the jurisdiction being served.

While effective coordination may reduce the total subsidy needs, the fare box and coordination will never cover all costs. Therefore, a continuing operating subsidy should be identified at the outset.

For instance, here are some economic options:

- Fare-free to all eligible riders. Cover costs by a combination of grants and local taxes.
- Combination fare-free to eligible riders and full fare to all others with eligibility by identification cards. Cover costs by fare revenues, grants for eligible rides, and local taxes for the balance.
- Strict full fare system, operated as a business either by private interests or a public agency.

Some rural transportation system operators argue that fare-box revenues could represent only a small fraction of the costs of operating their systems, perhaps an average of 25 percent of the overall costs. Many operators choose not to collect fares.

Many States have very stringent regulations for fare-collecting systems, but very relaxed regulations for fare-free systems. The costs and problems of collecting fares, including purchasing the fare-box system, setting up and operating complete accounting systems, and running the risk of theft, have led many successful systems to offer fare-free service according to some criteria of eligibility, such as age or a physical handicap.

Among the advantages of such a system may be lower insurance premiums, exemptions from various regulations, fewer mandated route schedules, and better cooperation on the part of the riders in keeping the vehicles in good condition and on efficient schedules.

Cash handling problems similarly extend to accepting donations or tips. Both practices should be forbidden. Drivers found to be accepting tips should be summarily dismissed, and that policy should be made clear both to drivers before they are hired and to riders by posting signs in the vehicles.

When the transportation system has the capability to provide some special trips for recreation or social activities to clubs, organizations, or businesses, a reasonable charge to the organization, not to the individuals, can be made.

For coordinated social service transportation and rural systems in general, then, collection of fares produces minimal revenue and much aggravation.

It's ludicrous to see how proud an operator is of the hundred dollars of revenue his half-million dollar system has generated. The justification usually given is that a rider's pride is offended if he or she can't pay something. Others say the fare-free approach smacks of "welfare."

In setting up a fare-free system, it's important to explain that taxes, not fares, are paying for the service.

Insurance

Adequate insurance coverage for transportation systems is essential to protect passengers, vehicles, the system itself, and other persons and property. Security suitable insurance at reasonable cost, however, is a serious and growing problem.

There is no uniform solution because each State has unique laws and requirements that affect the transportation system as well as insurance companies, brokers and agents. Become familiar with these laws and regulations before starting operations.

For new transportation systems being started, at the county level for instance, one good method of securing needed coverage at reasonable rates is to become part of an existing fleet insurance policy of the county government. This is preferable to buying a new, separate policy with so many "unknowns" that rates will be high.

Consult with other system operators in your area about how they handle insurance. Be aware that there are insurance brokers who specialize in finding reasonably priced insurance for transportation systems.

Purchasing insurance can be complex, but adequate coverage is so important that it is well worth the effort to shop around for advice, favorable terms, and the best possible prices.

Be aware that changes in definitions and other details of the transportation system and insurance solicitation can drastically affect the premiums. For instance, the age of passengers, or the safety record and training of drivers, or the distances and terrain of the routes of the system could be factors in determining premium levels.

The best policy is to determine the system's specific insurance needs to meet all legal requirements, then apply for the coverage needed. If the premium quoted is not acceptable, or if coverage is not available on the terms specified, then pursue every alternate option in order to find an acceptable balance of insurance coverage and price.

Funding Sources

Of course, the "bottom line" is how to pay for it all.

More than 93 Federal-level programs can fund transportation systems, components, or rides for eligible persons. Complete inventories have been attempted, but by the time they're compiled and printed, many programs have changed. Prospective sponsors and operators of rural public transportation systems are encouraged to approach the funding opportunities on two fronts:

1. By combining the transportation budget of various programs, you will create an initial operating budget that can provide more rides than all of the original, narrow-purpose services combined. After coordination is accomplished, seek additional funds.
2. Conduct a systematic search for funds, including the following steps:

Refer to the "Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance" published by the Office of Management and Budget each year. It gives the most complete, up-to-date, and official inventory of programs available, including current funding levels, deadlines, and agency contacts. The Catalog is usually available in libraries, town halls, courthouses, and government buildings throughout the country. Copies are also for sale from the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C. 20402.

Write or call your State-level Department of Transportation for funding suggestions. Get acquainted with the people and programs that may be available.

Get involved in State and national associations, such as the National Council for the Transportation Disadvantaged, the National Association of Counties, the National Rural Center, the National Council for Community Action and similar groups. Attend conferences, read publications, meet informally with others with similar interest. You'll learn a lot.

Write to your U.S. Representative and Senators and your State legislators asking them for information and referrals to the proper individuals and agencies that can help.

Refer to your survey of existing local programs. Ask the project directors to request more help from their sources.

Two programs led the way in social service transportation, and are still in operation. They are:

1. The Community Services Administration, formerly the Office of Economic Opportunity, continues to fund Community Action Programs (CAP agencies) throughout the Nation. These funds are growing scarcer each year. Still, insofar as transportation can help in the Nation's lingering "war on poverty" through CAP agencies, consult with CSA.
2. The Older Americans Act administered by the Administration on Aging, particularly Titles III and Title VII. Title III funds can be used for transportation by Area Offices on Aging. Title VII is the popular Nutrition Program which includes funds to provide transportation both for the food itself and for people to get to and from the nutrition centers.

In the mid-seventies, a new "heavy" source of funding came onto the scene in the form of Title XX of the Social Security Act. Each State sets its own priorities and if transportation is one of the priorities, which it is in most States, funds are available to local operators to provide rides for eligible riders to eligible destinations. Unfortunately, many local people assert that Title XX has become an administrative nightmare in too many States which have designed clumsy, top-heavy forms and accounting procedures that have become classics of bureaucratic overadministration. Still, every system should look at Title XX funds as they are a very real source of funds now available throughout the country.

Vocational Rehabilitation programs include funds to provide transportation for handicapped persons to and from sheltered workshops and other activities.

Title XIX of the Medicaid Program has also been used by some systems for funding transportation.

Special Education programs require students needing specialized assistance to be transported to central points which offer such training. Investigate the possibility of securing funds from this source to support the new system.

The Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) has funds for transporting people to and from employment and training programs. The program can also provide employees to help run the system.

Many people talk of funding through the Federal Highway Administration's Section 147 Rural Public Transportation Demonstration Program. In 1977, funds for new projects ran out. FmHA was able to fund only the second year of existing projects. Check appropriations before counting on any funds from this source.

Under the Urban Mass Transportation Act of 1974, the 16(b)2 program was established to allow vehicles to be bought for nonprofit corporations. Governmental units or systems are not eligible. UMTA provides no operating funds for rural transportation systems at the present time. Contact your State department of transportation for more information on this program.

Pitfalls

The experience of dozens of successful rural transportation systems has illustrated a number of pitfalls to look out for. Some of them are listed with notes on how to cope with them.

- Resistance to coordination will result from two human traits: ego, and the natural instinct to protect one's turf. Some operators of single-program transportation services that should be consolidated with other such fragmented service into a comprehensive transportation system may endeavor to protect their comfortable fiefdoms by using every conceivable excuse. At this point, the coordinator must present logical arguments with tact and firmness.

  The rationale for coordination is very convincing. Appeal to the individuals involved on the basis of reason. If that fails, appeal to the boards of directors or governing bodies for support of the concept. Such local support for cooperation is essential.

  Most social service agencies are funded by Federal grants which have a local cash or in-kind match. The power which local authorities have over such agencies is that match. It can be withheld unless the agency agrees to coordinate transportation services. This may be a reasonable and worthwhile use of financial leverage. Do not hesitate to recommend it.
- The local match, whether for the purchase of a vehicle or for funds for operation, usually means hard-to-raise local tax dollars. If it can be shown that a well-coordinated system reduces the amount of local match, most local community leaders will support your effort.
- A do-nothing approach is often advocated by people who are more concerned with long-range plans than with the unmet needs of the present time. Resist the idea that the "perfect" formula for success must be found before starting. Start to deliver rides as soon as possible, then refine and let the transportation system grow and expand as actual needs dictate and finances permit.
- Poor communication between the system manager and his employees on the one hand, and his superiors and funding sources on the other hand, must be avoided. Establish regular formal and informal lines of communications.
- Accounting omissions can give a false picture. Include the cost of vehicle replacement, insurance, and overhead and all other expenses related to the system to get an accurate financial picture and assess cost-effectiveness.
- Aloofness from the public can be fatal. Keep the public involved by conducting surveys, hearings, meetings and other two-way communications. At least annually, hold meetings to consider ideas for revised schedules and routes. Respond promptly to letters and calls.
- Organizational "traps" include allowing the

system to get "buried" in a larger department, confined by limiting laws governing "authorities" or "commissions," and strapped by commitments to review and advisory boards.

- Federal legislation does exist requiring operators receiving Urban Mass Transportation Administration (UMTA) funds to pay "not less than prevailing wages." This has been distorted by interpretation in some situations to prevent transportation systems from even starting until they agree to labor contracts that make the goal of cost-effectiveness a virtually impossible thing to achieve from the outset. Be careful on this issue until congress clarifies the situation. Many systems use Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) employees or other State and Federal job programs to meet their personnel needs.
- Bureaucracy must be avoided by resisting pressures to hire unnecessary employees and to invest in "frills."
- Geographical imbalance of service within the jurisdiction of the transportation system is to be avoided. Spread service around to carefully cover all sections of the service area.

Other pitfalls can be identified in conversations with operators of similar transportation systems. Such conversations are an important part of State and national transportation conferences held each year.

Sources of Additional Information

The information in this publication was reviewed for its accuracy and practicality by the National Council for the Transportation Disadvantaged. The following persons assisted the Council in its review. If you wish more specific information or need ideas about starting a rural transportation system or expanding an existing one, you may want to contact one of them. Write or call the person you select at the address given after the name.

Robert Aex, *Director of Public Transportation Service,* Knoxville, TN.

Neal Brown, *North Central Pennsylvania Transportation Authority (NCPTA),* Ridgeway, PA.

Jon C. Balson, *Staff Assistant to U.S. Congressman William J. Hughes,* NJ.

Sally Cooper, *Transportation Consultant,* Bryn Mawr, PA.

Earl Carver, *Transportation Director,* Community Action, Agency, Wichita Falls, TX.

John Fish, *Vice President,* Technical Resource Associates (TRA), Washington, D.C.

Billie Harmon, *Transportation Director,* People For Progress, Dunlop, TN.

John Huddleston, *Professor,* Advanced Transportation Council, University of Texas, Austin, TX.

Edward Hudson, *Director,* Unified Human Service Transportation, Roanoke, VA.

J. Len Lovdahl, *President,* Handicabs, Inc., Milwaukee, WI.

Douglas McKelvey, *Research Associate,* National Transportation Policy Commission, Washington, D.C.

Ysidro Molina, *Director,* Dial-A-Ride. Los Angeles, CA.

Kay E. Neil, *Advisor,* Metro Area Transit, Omaha, NE.

Larry Newlin, *Rural Programs Advisor,* National Rural Center, Washington, D.C.

James R. McNihch, III, *Delaware Authority for Specialized Transportation (DAST),* Wilmington, DE.

Peter M. Schauer, *General Manager,* Older Adults Transportation Service, Inc. (OATS), Columbia, MO.

Donald Somers, *President,* Yellow Cab Co., Red Bank, NJ.

Sandra Spence, *Federal Legislative Rep.,* California Department of Transportation, Washington, D.C.

David F. Vaughan, *Director,* Appalachian Ohio Regional Transportation Association (AORTA), Athens, OH.

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National Council for the Transportation Disadvantaged
c/o Cape May County Airport
Rio Grande, NJ 08242

John O. Salvenson, Executive Director
Fred Coldren, Editor
Wayne Bridgens, Artist

Farmers Home Administration
Washington, D.C. 20250

Ira Kaye
John H. Pentecost
William R. Seymour